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Except for Castro

The Day Everything Went Wrong

By Ralph J. Donaldson

Take the imbecilities which led to the charge of the Light Brigade, add some of the most heroic fighting against great odds since the defense of Corregidor, flavor with the ordeal of the Ancient Mariner, combine with some of the most inhumane treatment of prisoners since the Black Hole of Calcutta, garnish with the biggest ransom in history, accompanied by the poker playing diplomacy of a civilian, sprinkle with U.S. politics, embellish with the personal recollections of survivors and the result is *The Bay of Pigs* by Haynes Bonner Johnson (Norton, \$5.95).

Castro's "non-existent" air force sinks the Houston, one of the Brigade supply ships. An eye-witness painting by Brigade frogman Andy Pruna.

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Johnson, assistant city editor of the Washington Star, took a year's leave of absence to gather material for his book, which was completed with the assistance of Manuel Artime, Jose Perez San Roman, Erneido Oliva and Enrique Ruiz-Williams, who played leading roles in the ill-fated invasion of Castro's Cuba in 1961 and in the subsequent efforts to ransom the prisoners.

THE TRAINING of Cuban exiles for the invasion was authorized by President Eisenhower in 1960, the operation was directed in secrecy by the Central Intelligence Agency and the battle plan was approved by the Joints Chiefs of Staff and President Kennedy. Perhaps the most startling revelation is that one of the CIA agents told the Cuban leaders that if Washington tried to stop the invasion they should put him under guard and go ahead with it anyway.

As it turned out, Washington did not try to stop the invasion but everything went wrong. The 16 World War II B-26 attack bombers assigned to the Cuban brigade failed to knock out all of Castro's air force. A planned diversionary action, the landing of commandos in Oriente province, did not take place. There were sharp reefs and coral in the Bay of Pigs landing area. One supply ship was sunk and the rest fled because there was no air cover. The Cuban underground was not alerted in time. There was no popular uprising against Castro and there were no mass defections from Castro's forces.

Nevertheless, the 1,500 men of Brigade 2506 fought Castro's troops and tanks to a standstill until they ran out of ammunition. They lost about 300 men, while inflicting 3,600 casualties on Castro's forces—1,600 dead and 2,000 wounded.

EVEN WHEN President Kennedy belatedly authorized jet fighter planes from the U.S. carrier Essex to provide air cover for the landing of more supplies, the timing was wrong and the planes never took off.

One thousand, one hundred and ninety-nine members of the Brigade were captured and later ransomed for \$68 million worth of drugs and baby food. Twenty-two escaped from the Bay of Pigs in a 22-foot sailboat. Fifteen days later they were picked up in the Gulf of Mexico. There were only 12 left and these were barely alive.

This is a true adventure story, one which is so incredible it would not be believed if it were not documented by historical facts and eyewitness testimony.

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